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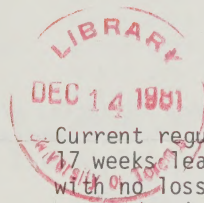
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Maternity Leave

The dramatic increase in the number of women in the labour force has meant that women's issues such as equal pay, childcare and improved maternity benefits have emerged as important areas of concern in the workplace as women press for benefits which suit the realities of their lives. The recent well-publicized strike by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) focused public attention on the important issue of maternity leave.

Central to the debate on maternity leave is the assertion that women perform vital roles as mothers and as workforce participants and should not be economically penalized because they bear children. We can no longer ignore the fact that women are in the labour force to stay. Over half of all Ontario women work and 70% work in their prime childbearing years (ages 20-44). It has been shown that most women work out of economic necessity, - they are not marginal, occasional workers. They are not secondary wage earners. In order for them to participate on an equal footing with men and in recognition of the value of their reproductive function, women need protection from job loss, loss of seniority, and loss of benefits and wages which can result from pregnancy and childbirth.



Current regulations in Ontario allow for 17 weeks leave of absence for maternity with no loss of benefits or seniority accrued prior to leave. Federal Unemployment Insurance Maternity Benefits (UI-MB) cover 15 weeks leave at 60% salary to a maximum of \$189 per week provided the woman qualifies for benefits. It must be emphasized however, that many women do not qualify. Those who work fewer than 20 hours a week and those who have not worked the required number of weeks in a given period preceding childbirth receive nothing. In some instances, eligibility criteria for maternity benefits are stricter than criteria for unemployment insurance. Across the country, in 1980 alone, 17,000 claims for maternity benefits were rejected.

Even with UI-MB, many families suffer financial hardship as a result of childbirth. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers estimates that the average loss of each of the 239 postal workers who took 20 weeks off for maternity in 1980 was \$4,629 - a disastrous amount for many families coping with high inflation rates.

Against this background, women are seeking greater access to UI-MB for all working women and fully paid maternity leave. Council supports more generous maternity leave policies as well as adoptive and paternity leave.

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From Where I Stand



Lynne Gordon
Chairperson
Ontario Status
of Women Council

We have come a long way in recent years in securing women's right to maternity benefits, but we have a long way to go in developing maternity leave policies which will place women on an equal footing with men in the labour force.

As more and more women enter the workforce and remain throughout their prime childbearing years, it is clear that business and government must devise strategies to help parents manage increasingly complex work and family responsibilities. But, since women alone bear children, they alone need protection for loss of jobs and wages which can result from pregnancy and childbirth.

It may come as a surprise to many to learn that, in Canada, we lag far behind other industrialized countries in providing maternity leave and benefits. In most European countries, 6 months leave is typical with a growing move to extend leave to 9 months or a year. Further, these countries have more flexible leave which can be extended without loss of job or seniority for periods ranging from 6 months to 2 years. As far as income replacement is concerned, there are many examples of countries which ensure close to full or full salary to women on maternity leave. France has 16 weeks leave at full wages. West Germany has 7½ months, - 14 weeks with a flat rate benefit of 70% of the average wage for working women supplemented to full wage by the employer, and the flat rate for the remaining period. In Sweden, either parent receives 9 months at 90% salary. This list is not exhaustive and Canada with 17 weeks leave at 60% wages and optional employer contributions beyond that is far behind indeed!

Good maternity policies benefit employers, employees, parents and children - all of society. We should move forward together on this important issue.

Lynne Gordon

Maternity Leave (continued)

The concept of paid maternity leave is slowly gaining acceptance in Canada. It is recognized that employers provide fully or partially paid leave in special life circumstances such as sickness, disability, sabbaticals or alcohol rehabilitation and pregnancy should not be an exception.

To date, 1,241 Canadian companies have filed with the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission for Supplemental Unemployment Benefits (SUB) for maternity purposes. Under an approved SUB plan, the employer agrees to supplement the employees on maternity leave so that the U.I. benefit and SUB do not exceed 95% of regular earnings. Of course, an employee must first qualify for U.I. benefits. The Province of Quebec has given the 125,000 women in its public service the right to 20 weeks of fully paid maternity leave. Unions are beginning to include maternity leave as part of their negotiations with management.

Despite gains, there is strong resistance to fully paid maternity leave which many believe could prove very costly, particularly for small businesses. Creative solutions will be required to find ways to help small employers cope with costs. In the long run, maternity benefits policies which improve on the existing UI-MB will benefit large and small companies by ensuring a more stable workforce. All women will benefit through a recognition of the importance of their childbearing role and the removal of a significant barrier to full equality in the workforce.

Rape Evidence Kit

The Provincial Secretariat for Justice, in co-operation with the Centre of Forensic Sciences, the Ministry of Health and the Niagara Committee against Rape and Sexual Assault has developed a sexual assault evidence kit for use in hospitals across the Province. The kit is designed to help hospital personnel conduct a careful examination of the assault victim to ensure that the forensic evidence collected is complete and can be used in court should the victim decide to press charges. All hospitals should have a kit available on a 24-hour basis. Kits will be replaced after use by request to the local police department.

The Secretariat has also prepared a video-tape to increase awareness of the procedures involved in helping a rape victim. The half hour tape titled Helping the Victim of Sexual Assault is widely used in Ontario to educate rape crisis workers, police, hospital personnel and other professionals who come in contact with victims. Apart from demonstrating the use of the kit, the video-tape shows one hospital's efforts to help victims cope with the ordeal with "minimum trauma and maximum dignity". It emphasizes the importance of immediate treatment to avoid long, often humiliating waits in emergency and the value of sensitive counselling. For further information, contact Ruth Cornish, Policy Development Officer, Provincial Secretariat for Justice, Room 1335, Whitney Block, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2 Telephone: 965-4810

NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS APPOINTED

Three new members have been appointed to the Ontario Status of Women Council for three-year terms.

GWEN BOWER-BINNS, Ottawa, has been active for many years on the National Council of Women and is the Past President of the Provincial Council of Women. She has also served on the National United Nations Association.

ANNABELLE LOGAN, London, board member of the London Family and Children's Services Society and Co-Chairperson with the Honourable Margaret Birch of the London Conference on Families.

BARBARA MARY STONE, St. Catharines, is a legal secretary and an active member of St. John's Anglican Church in Port Dalhousie.

Disabled Women

Honourable Margaret Birch, Provincial Secretary for Social Development recently announced changes in the family benefits program to remove sexist elements.

Starting this November, disabled female recipients of family benefits will continue to be eligible for these benefits should they marry. In addition, eligibility for family benefits will be extended to all wives with a disability by next April.

Previously, disabled men with non-disabled wives were eligible for family benefits, whereas disabled wives with non-disabled husbands were ineligible.

Women in Trades

A group called Women in Trades, Toronto, sponsors a travelling Women and Trades Fair which will be available starting January 1982 to women's groups, unions and schools across the province. It consists of a photographic display, a Guide Resource Booklet and printed interviews with women in "blue collar" jobs. This display could be effectively incorporated into any program exploring non-traditional options for women.

The Guide Resource Booklet for women outlining non-traditional occupations suggests that the disadvantages of working in trades areas, which can include dirty, noisy, more hazardous jobs are outweighed by the many advantages such as higher self-esteem, financial independence and challenging work. Women considering a career in trades are urged to carefully select the right type of work, and to seek support from groups such as Women in Trades or women's union groups, especially at the outset. The booklet includes a resources guide and annotated bibliography of books and films on a variety of related topics. Copies of the booklet are available through the Status of Women Council office. For further information contact:

Women in Trades,
c/o Times Change Employment Agency,
932 Bathurst Street,
Toronto, Ontario

New Secretary of State Funds

In March 1981, Secretary of State, Francis Fox announced a \$3 million increase in the budget of the Women's Program bringing the total allocation to \$4.1 million. The program was established in 1973 "to promote social development and voluntary action by providing resources, technical assistance and grants to women's voluntary organizations for the support of advocacy, skill development, research, information exchange, co-ordination and public education on the status of women."

Marcel Goldfinger, Ontario Regional Director, Secretary of State, stated that economic development/independence, violence against women, and immigrant women are of particular interest to the region. For more information on Secretary of State programs, contact your local field office in London, Hamilton, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Ottawa or Toronto.

Native Women

A United Nations Committee has censured Canada for violating a U.N. human rights treaty when it denied Indian status and rights to Sandra Lovelace, an Indian married to a white man. It is a provision of the Indian Act that Indian women lose their status if they marry non-Indians. The same does not apply to Indian men and the U.N. committee found that the Act violates the International treaty because it makes a distinction solely on the basis of sex.

Lovelace, now divorced from her husband, appealed to the U.N. when she and her children were denied the right to live on her tribal reserve in Tobique, N.B.

Hon. Judy Erola, Minister of State for the Status of Women announced recently that Canada will sign a United Nations human rights treaty and amend laws which discriminate against native Canadian Indian women who marry non-Indian men.

